



VMUN 2026

Cabinet

BACKGROUND GUIDE



## Vancouver Model United Nations

The Twenty-Fifth Annual Session | January 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Carmelito Bao, and I am honoured to serve as the director of the Cabinet Crisis Committee. I, along with your Chair Guntas Bawa and Assistant Director Huen Xie, would like to welcome you to this year's iteration of the Cabinet Committee at VMUN 2026.

As a Grade 12 student at Rockridge Secondary School, this marks my third and final year of Model UN. Since my first conference, which I was convinced, and forced, to attend, my fascination with Model UN only grew as I navigated numerous and varied committees to engage in the fast-paced debate that characterizes MUN conferences. While my life extends beyond Model UN to include playing piano and narrowly surviving my AP courses, MUN and the unforgettable memories I make at each conference will always be special.

In this year's Cabinet Committee, you will take up vital roles in the government of the early Meiji Restoration to address a multitude of issues. The Tokugawa shogunate has conceded, yet loyalists in the north remain hostile to the rule of the new emperor. The culture and political environment remain unstable in the wake of such upheaval, while Western influence threatens to overpower the government both militarily and economically. It is up to the committee to stabilize the disordered state of the country, and success will undoubtedly entail collaboration and meticulous planning to create a unified response strong enough to quell the unrest that plagues the nation.

Otherwise, if you have any questions about the committee or the topic, please don't hesitate to contact the dais team at [cabinet@vmun.com](mailto:cabinet@vmun.com). I have no doubt that each of you will succeed this weekend, and I look forward to meeting you all!

Best regards,

Carmelito Bao  
Cabinet Director

# Position Paper Policy

## What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For CCPCJ, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers.

## Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

## Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **January 12, 2026, at 23:59 PT**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email. Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award. The email address for this committee is [cabinet@vmun.com](mailto:cabinet@vmun.com).

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# Topic: The Meiji Restoration

## Overview

In the two centuries before 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate had adhered to its isolationist policy of *Sakoku* with very few exceptions. Among its priorities was the prevention of the dissemination of Western ideals and religion in Japan through demonstrating active hostility to foreigners while also limiting external trade.<sup>1</sup> Over the following decades, the shogunate issued domestic directives to curtail contact with outside nations. However, in 1853, this policy wavered in the face of the Perry Expedition—a naval expedition from the United States which leveraged its firepower to force open Japan’s borders.<sup>2</sup> The concession to the demands of foreign nations that rapidly followed was perceived as a national humiliation. This humiliation exacerbated doubts of the shogunate’s ability to govern, sowing discontent among the population. Consequently, this culminated in the resignation of Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the *shogun* or otherwise the de facto leader of the nation.<sup>3</sup> Despite his relinquishing of power in November of 1867, Yoshinobu retained notable influence in the government. Several feudal states, also known as domains, found this intolerable, with the Satsuma and Chōshū domains instigating a coup d’état to occupy the capital, Kyoto, and the imperial palace while declaring Emperor Meiji’s authority to rule Japan.<sup>4</sup>

The otherwise peaceful transition of authority did not last. In January of 1868, Yoshinobu called for a repeal of the restoration order, amassing forces to execute an attack on a Kyoto still occupied by Satsuma and Chōshū forces, referred to hereafter as the Satchō Alliance.<sup>5</sup> Despite small imports of foreign armaments and the onboarding of several French officers as advisors, shogunate forces were still outmatched by the technologically superior Satchō forces as the Boshin War broke out at the Battle of Toba-Fushimi on January 27th, 1868.<sup>6</sup> While a decisive victory for the Satchō alliance, one skirmish does not decide the war. Loyalist forces and Yoshinobu’s foreign connections threaten to topple the Meiji Restoration just months into its existence.

The cabinet of the infant Meiji Restoration faces the arduous prospect of overhauling nearly every facet of the current administration. Most pressing is the installation of both political and economic reform while preventing the irreversible intrusion of Western influence into the country. At the same time, an escalating civil war compromises the legitimacy and capability of the new Meiji Empire, threatening to undo any progress made by the new government. Japan’s economy, sovereignty, and national pride tethers with great uncertainty as the country undergoes an extensive reconstitution under the command of this committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Everett Munoz, “Sakoku,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 16, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sakoku>.

<sup>2</sup> “The United States and the Opening to Japan, 1853,” Office of the Historian, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/opening-to-japan>.

<sup>3</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Tokugawa Period,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tokugawa-period>.

<sup>4</sup> Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryoma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 333.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Turnbull, “Once We Were Warriors the Re-Awakening of the Samurai Tradition in the 1868 Boshin War’s Akita-Shonai Campaign,” J-STAGE, 2011, [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/aiugr/3/0/3\\_1/\\_article/-char/ja/](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/aiugr/3/0/3_1/_article/-char/ja/), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Ravina, *The Last Samurai: The Life and Battles of Saigo Takamori* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 149-152.

## Timeline

**1603** — The Tokugawa Shogunate is founded.<sup>7</sup>

**1635** — Significant edicts are implemented, instating the Sakoku isolationist policy.<sup>8</sup> Under this doctrine, Japanese citizens are forbidden from exiting or reentering the country, foreign influences such as Christianity are prohibited, and contact with foreign nations including trade is heavily restricted or outright disallowed.

**1637** — Famine and political failures result in the Shimabara Rebellion, a revolt of Christian peasants and ronin. This convinces the shogunate to outlaw Christianity and strengthen Sakoku to prevent the propagation of Western ideologies.<sup>9</sup>

**1651** — The Keian Uprising occurs in response to a reorganization of the feudal system directed by the Tokugawa shogunate.<sup>10</sup> The uprising was intended to destroy shogunate supplies, set fire to Edo, and assassinate government officials to draw attention to the grievances of the samurai class.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, it is unsuccessful in enacting change, and its conclusion marks the end of violent challenges to the shogunate's rule for two centuries.<sup>12</sup>

**1716** — Fiscal reform is made through the Kyōhō Reforms, precipitating limited success.<sup>13</sup> However, it fails to address the societal issues that led to the stagnating economy, and the temporary reinvigoration of the economy fades.

**1786** — Severe crop failure and disturbances to the environment from natural disasters result in the Tenmei Famine. The Tokugawa shogunate fails to address the famine, resulting in the deaths of approximately 130,000 people from starvation and disease.<sup>14</sup>

**1841** — The Tenpō reforms fail to address the failing economy and agricultural sector, demonstrating the Tokugawa shogunate's weakening grasp.<sup>15</sup>

**July 8, 1853** — The Perry Expedition arrives in Japan at Edo Bay and intimidates the shogunate into opening the borders.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tokugawa Period."

<sup>8</sup> Munez, "Sakoku."

<sup>9</sup> Conrad Totman, *A History of Japan* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 223-224.

<sup>10</sup> Lutz R. C., "Edo Rebellions," EBSCO, 2022, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/politics-and-government/edo-rebellions>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 237-240.

<sup>14</sup> Michael McCaskey, "Tenmei Famine," EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/tenmei-famine>.

<sup>15</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tempō Reforms," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tempo-reforms>.

<sup>16</sup> Office of the Historian, "The United States and the Opening to Japan, 1853."

**February 13, 1854** — Commodore Matthew Perry returns to Japan and signs the Treaty of Kanagawa, which obligated Japan to protect stranded sailors and open two ports for supplying American ships.<sup>17</sup>

**July 29, 1858** — The Harris Treaty opens Japanese ports to trade and allows American citizens to reside in Japan without Japanese legal jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup> The concession to foreign demands is seen as a national humiliation, with Ii Naosuke assassinated for his role in signing the Harris Treaty.<sup>19</sup>

**July 1864** — During the Kinmon Incident, Chōshū forces lead attacks on Kyoto and set fires; they are ultimately repelled by forces from the Satsuma and Aizu domains.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, the first Chōshū expedition is undertaken as a punitive military expedition by the Tokugawa shogunate in response to the Chōshū domain's role in the Kinmon Incident.<sup>21</sup>

**1866** — The Satchō Alliance is formed between the Satsuma and Chōshū domains to restore imperial rule. Chōshū forces are able to access modern weapons through the Satsuma domain's trade with Western merchants.<sup>22</sup>

**June 1866** — The Tokugawa shogunate undertakes the Second Chōshū expedition as another punitive measure but suffers a defeat as their archaic equipment and structure cannot match the new western provisions of the Chōshū forces.<sup>23</sup> The failure demonstrates the weakening of the national military.

**August 29, 1866** — Tokugawa Iemochi dies, succeeded by Tokugawa Yoshinobu.<sup>24</sup>

**January 30, 1867** — Emperor Kōmei dies; Emperor Meiji ascends to the throne in place.<sup>25</sup>

**November 1867** — Tokugawa Yoshinobu abdicates power to Emperor Meiji.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> William G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), 105-107.

<sup>19</sup> "Ii Naosuke," Nakasendo Way, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.nakasendoway.com/ii-naosuke/>.

<sup>20</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 293; "Kinmon Rebellion," Samurai Archives, accessed June 28, 2025, [http://samurai-archives.com/wiki/Kinmon\\_Rebellion](http://samurai-archives.com/wiki/Kinmon_Rebellion).

<sup>21</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 293.

<sup>22</sup> Yasuo Masai and Takeshi Toyoda, "The Fall of the Tokugawa," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Japan/The-fall-of-the-Tokugawa>.

<sup>23</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 293-295.

<sup>24</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tokugawa Yoshinobu," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tokugawa-Yoshinobu>.

<sup>25</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 149-152.

<sup>26</sup> Graham Squires, "Meiji Restoration," World History Encyclopedia, October 29, 2022, [https://www.worldhistory.org/Meiji\\_Restoration/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Meiji_Restoration/).



**January 3, 1868** — Imperial forces seize Kyoto and the imperial palace in a coup d'état.<sup>27</sup>

**January 27, 1868** — Shogunate forces headed by Tokugawa Yoshinobu attack Kyoto to seize control at the Battle of Toba-Fushimi, marking the start of the Boshin War.<sup>28</sup>

**January 30, 1868 (Initiating Crisis)** — Shogunate forces are defeated on the fourth day of the Battle of Toba-Fushimi. The loss is solidified by Tokugawa Yoshinobu's retreat from Osaka to Edo.<sup>29</sup>

## Historical Analysis

### Edo Period (1603-1868)

The Edo period and the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate emerged from the instability of the violent *Sengoku* period, which was characterized by constant war and social upheaval.<sup>30</sup> In 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the eventual first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate, led a coalition of feudal lords known as daimyo to victory at the Battle of Sekigahara.<sup>31</sup> The victory disrupted the opposing coalition led by Ishida Mitsunari that sought to prevent Ieyasu's rising political influence.<sup>32</sup> This victory fractured Mitsunari's forces and secured Ieyasu's position in the new Japanese government, having been elevated to shogun by Emperor Go-Yōzei in 1603.

Power was firmly consolidated in the hands of the Tokugawa shogunate through various domestic policies that strategically limited the capabilities of hostile or otherwise troublesome domains, establishing the system of *sankin kotai*, requiring daimyo to alternate between living in their domains and Edo. At the same time, their families resided in Edo permanently.<sup>33</sup> The frequent absence from their domains limited daimyos' ability to accumulate wealth or exert political influence within them, while the shogunate's proximity to their families disincentivized rebellion.

The Confucian social order of the early Edo period was fully entrenched in government policy in a bid to preserve the stability of the new shogunate.<sup>34</sup> The population was divided into four distinct classes: the samurai, peasants, craftsmen, and merchants, in descending order of status.<sup>35</sup> Initially, this system achieved its objective of stability and prevented political upheavals from large-scale transitions between social classes. Given the peace that characterized a majority of the Edo period, the samurai adopted a role similar to that of a civil servant with their labour paid for in rice.<sup>36</sup> The peasants were the largest class and produced the rice necessary for the Japanese

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<sup>27</sup> James Huffman, "The Meiji Restoration Era, 1868-1889," Japan Society, June 11, 2021, <https://japansociety.org/news/the-meiji-restoration-era-1868-1889/>.

<sup>28</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 149-152.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 2-5.

<sup>31</sup> Myles Hudson, "Battle of Sekigahara," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Sekigahara>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 220-221.

<sup>34</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 22-25.

<sup>35</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 101-120.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

economy to function. Craftsmen were workers who created other goods and were seen as below peasants since they did not produce food; meanwhile, merchants were at the bottom of the hierarchy due to their role not engaging in production.<sup>37</sup> The rigidity of such a structure, however, prevented society from adapting to changing circumstances. Notably, many samurai became destitute in the weakening economy. Simultaneously, the merchant class grew wealthier, as foreign trade introduced new commodities, while the peasants faced increasing taxation.<sup>38</sup> The stability that the social order introduced now stunted continued economic development, as individuals were unable to address the issues regarding their social classes.

The initial stability of the new Edo period allowed significant socioeconomic development to blossom. Most notable was the population growth that was able to be sustained during the peaceful redirection of society, increasing from roughly twelve to thirteen million to thirty million over the 17th century.<sup>39</sup> Much of this occurred in the peasant classes who were now able to proliferate in the absence of war and the resulting destruction of critical resources, most importantly crop fields.<sup>40</sup> The economic restructuring eliminated the waste of the conflicts that characterized the prior Sengoku period. Despite developments such as urbanization and improved logistical lines, the economy remained primarily agricultural during the Edo period. The rice-based taxation system kept economic output focused on agriculture, while feudalism prevented the national unity necessary for a shift towards industrialization. There was, however, significant development in the farming practices to optimize productivity, increasing the overall yield and strengthening the economy.<sup>41</sup>

Sakoku, the policy of national isolation, was also implemented to aid in stabilizing the country.<sup>42</sup> While not an official governmental term, the policy involved heavy regulation of foreign interactions to protect Japan from external ideological threats yet kept communications open with select countries such as the Netherlands, China, and Korea.<sup>43</sup> Despite being a European country, the Netherlands was specifically allowed access as they were not Catholics, unlike other seafaring trade nations such as Portugal and Spain.<sup>44</sup> This fear of Christian influence—especially Catholicism—permeated Japanese society and academia; even imported Chinese books were examined for references to Christianity.<sup>45</sup> The policy remained exclusionary throughout the Edo period, forbidding Japanese citizens to leave and executing those who returned, appearing as a demonstration of strength until the Perry Expedition and the following Kanagawa Treaty. The treaties and the presence of American citizens were a significant breach of the previously maintained isolationist policy sowing discontent that began the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate.

### Ōshio Heihachirō's Rebellion (1837)

Ōshio Heihachirō, a former Tokugawa official and social reformer, created a violent resistance movement in Osaka in 1837 in direct response to the shogunate's failures during the Tenpō Famine.<sup>46</sup> The revolt attempted to

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<sup>37</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 108-117.

<sup>38</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 237.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), 95-97.

<sup>42</sup> Munez, "Sakoku."

<sup>43</sup> Emir Karakaya, *THE SAKOKU POLICY OF TOKUGAWA BAKUFU Legitimacy, Sovereignty, Independence*, accessed June 28, 2025, [https://www.academia.edu/28999813/THE\\_SAKOKU\\_POLICY\\_OF\\_TOKUGAWA\\_BAKUFU\\_Legitimacy\\_sovereignty\\_independence](https://www.academia.edu/28999813/THE_SAKOKU_POLICY_OF_TOKUGAWA_BAKUFU_Legitimacy_sovereignty_independence).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 92.

<sup>46</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 37-38.

call out the government corruption as well as the administration's indifference to the societal issues of the poor, having been influenced by Confucian ideals regarding the support of the impoverished.<sup>47</sup> Heihachirō directed the rebellion to forcefully seize and distribute the wealth of merchants, as well as burn tax records and merchant storehouses. For him, these ultimately represented the fundamental imbalance of resources in society.<sup>48</sup> Despite the organization, the poor training and equipment of the insurgents led to a quick defeat by a local shogunate militia; Heihachirō subsequently self-immolated to avoid capture. While militarily unsuccessful, the rebellion greatly dispelled the illusion of peace for the shogunate as one of the first major instances of ideological resistance led by a former government official.

### Tenpō Reforms (1841-1843)

The Tenpō Reforms were a series of policies implemented by the Tokugawa shogunate in the late Edo period.<sup>49</sup> The reforms were led by Mizuno Tadakuni who sought to reimplement the values that had characterized the prior Kyoho reforms, encouraging frugality and moral righteousness.<sup>50</sup> The Kyoho reforms themselves had a temporary success in strengthening the economy through new policies and directives, but the underlying issues reemerged as the overall economic structure remained unchanged. The Tenpō famine from 1833-1837 which disrupted the growth of rice crops around the country, occurred as a result of unnaturally cold weather. While not attributable to the Tokugawa shogunate, the event did draw the ire of many due to the lack of an effective response from the government.<sup>51</sup> The necessity for the Tenpō Reforms arose primarily as a response to mounting failures, notably the aforementioned famine, economic imbalances between classes, and foreign pressures. The samurai also grew impoverished as their fixed stipends failed to support them in the weakening economy.<sup>52</sup> Many suffering the effects of famine migrated to urban centers, in turn decreasing the farming population—ultimately leading to a downturn that both hindered the economy and worsened the famine in a circular manner. In response, Tadakuni passed the “Return Law” which forced farmers to return to the villages and outlawed moving into the city for work.<sup>53</sup> Despite the efforts to enact change, the reforms remained mostly unsuccessful and only propagated greater frustration with the shogunate. Specifically, the increase in shogunate authority while failing to fully address the hardships of the population angered the public, while the moralizing tone of the reforms appeared patronizing to many.

### Perry Expedition (1853)

By the mid-19th century, the United States had begun expanding its maritime influence through establishing its presence in East Asia by negotiating trade routes with China.<sup>54</sup> Apart from the possibility of trade with Japan, American sailors also sought to harvest natural resources from the region, with large fleets of whalers harvesting whale oil used for lighting and industrial processes. In this process, many such whalers drifted ashore in Japan, encouraging the American government to breach the isolationism of Japan not only for new economic pathways but also to secure the protection of its own citizens.<sup>55</sup> It was then in 1853 that Commodore Matthew Perry arrived with orders to open Japan's borders alongside a small fleet of warships. The display of force allowed the expedition

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 223-224.

<sup>49</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Tempō reforms.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 252-253.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 225-226.

<sup>52</sup> Kozo Yamamura, *The Economic Emergence of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>53</sup> “Tenpo Reforms,” Touken World, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.touken-world.jp/history/history-important-word/tempo-no-kaikaku/>.

<sup>54</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 275.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 274-276.

to enter the restricted zones around Edo and present a letter detailing the initial goals of the negotiation, providing shelter to shipwrecked sailors and opening at least one port for the resupply of American vessels.<sup>56</sup> The following year, Perry would return to receive an answer and would sign the Kanagawa Treaty, which forced open Japan's borders and marked the end of Japanese isolationism.

Perry found some success as the Kanagawa Treaty opened the Shimoda and Hakodate ports for the supply and repair of American vessels in the region as well as the provision of aid to American sailors.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the United States was able to negotiate the presence of a consul in Shimoda.<sup>58</sup> Despite this, Perry was unable to secure terms of trade in this treaty; however, it did lay the groundwork for future negotiations, such as the later Harris Treaty. Even without the direct establishment of trade routes, the possibility of trade and concessions to foreign powers would remain a point of contention in the political domain of Japan until the succession of the Tokugawa shogunate by the Meiji Empire in 1868.<sup>59</sup>

### **Sonnō jōi (1853-1867)**

Translating to “Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians,” the slogan of *sonnō jōi* emerged during the late Edo period.<sup>60</sup> *Sonnō jōi* became popularized as a direct result of the Perry Expedition and the ensuing treaties, believing Japan to be under direct threat from hostile Western powers.<sup>61</sup> The nationalistic sentiments behind the movement called for an increase in the emperor's presence in the government and the removal of Western influence from the nation.<sup>62</sup> The movement was adopted as a doctrine by numerous domains, such as the Chōshū domain, as well as other disillusioned samurai. This disillusionment provoked several attacks on both shogunate officials and foreigners, such as the killings of Ii Naosuke, who played a prominent role in the Harris Treaty and the Ansei Purge, and the British merchant Charles Lennox Richardson in the Namamugi incident.<sup>63</sup> While this domestic unrest eventually brought about the fall of the shogunate and *sonnō jōi* developed into a more generalized expression of national pride, the collateral damage to foreign citizens continues to sour the relationship between Japan and its foreign connections.

### **Ansei Purge (1858-1860)**

Ii Naosuke, an influential daimyo aligned with the shogunate, would be directed to carry out the Ansei Purge from 1858 to 1860 to remove officials who opposed shogunate policy.<sup>64</sup> With dissidents officially accused of “plots” and “misconduct”, over 100 would be sentenced to punishments of varying degrees, with several being executed.<sup>65</sup> The objectives of the purge were to silence dissenters and reassert the control of the Tokugawa shogunate, while suppressing the *sonnō jōi* movement that undermined the shogunate's importance. However, the effects on the shogunate administration did not unfold smoothly, with party division only being strengthened in the face of the purge. Such a wanton display of authoritarianism only emboldened opposition to the shogunate

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<sup>56</sup> Office of the Historian, “The United States and the Opening to Japan, 1853.”

<sup>57</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 96.

<sup>58</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 278-279.

<sup>59</sup> Yamamura, *The Economic Emergence of Modern Japan*, 32-37.

<sup>60</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 286.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 286-290.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Philip C. Brown, “Ii Naosuke,” EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/ii-naosuke>; Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 183.

<sup>64</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 293-294.

<sup>65</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 137.

and radicalized many new reformers. This particularly backfired on Naosuke himself, as he would be assassinated near Edo in the Sakuradamon Incident in 1860.<sup>66</sup> The Ansei Purge significantly shifted the perception of the Tokugawa shogunate's legitimacy in the public eye, no longer able to maintain popular support through policy. Instead, it was beginning to rely on force and authoritarianism. The survivors of the purge would also push for greater political reform in the following years.

### **Satchō Alliance (1866)**

The Satchō Alliance was a covert pact formed between the Satsuma and Chōshū domains with the aim to restore Imperial rule in place of the Tokugawa shogunate.<sup>67</sup> In the ensuing conflict, the two domains played a pivotal role in instating the Meiji Restoration and removing the Tokugawa shogunate from power entirely. Leaders from these two domains would rise to prominence as architects of the new Imperial administration.

Of the two domains, Chōshū was the expected perpetrator by the shogunate. Chōshū had numerous reasons both to ally with the Satsuma domain as well as revolt against the incumbent shogunate. First was the Chōshū domain's open hostility towards the shogunate, especially after its alignment with the Sonnō jōi movement and the punitive Shogunate-led Chōshū expeditions.<sup>68</sup> The first expedition created mild reform, but the second failed entirely. Part of this outcome was attributable to Chōshū's connections with English traders through the Satsuma domain, allowing the Chōshū forces to acquire Western armaments which greatly outperformed the shogunate's weapons.<sup>69</sup> Not only did the Satchō Alliance provide connections, but its power in the Edo period legitimized the Chōshū domain's grievances with the shogunate and its belief in the failures of the Tokugawa government.

Satsuma instead held a privileged position in the Tokugawa regime. Despite the strong relationship with the shogunate, the domain lost faith in the government following their weak response to Western pressure and adoption of lopsided treaties, sharing this disdain with the Chōshū.<sup>70</sup> Despite supporting the notion of punitive measures for Chōshū after the attack on Kyoto, they found that the first Chōshū expedition was excessively harsh and refused to participate in the second. Satsuma held significant power and believed itself able to seize power and lead a new government, which was compounded by its disillusion with the shogunate.<sup>71</sup> Members of the alliance would receive prestigious roles in the new Meiji Empire, having been pivotal in the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate.

### **Christianity**

Christianity was introduced to Japan by Francis Xavier in 1549, rapidly spreading throughout southern Japan to reach an estimated population of about 300,000 Japanese converts by the early 17th century.<sup>72</sup> However, after the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, Christianity was seen instead as a threat to the social order and in conflict with the traditional Confucian philosophy of the country. Its introduction by Western missionaries led to its association with foreign allegiances and rebellion against the shogunate, and as a result, Christianity was

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<sup>66</sup> Brown, "Ii Naosuke."

<sup>67</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 293-294.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 126-127.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 124-126.

<sup>71</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 293-295.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1951), 37.

entirely suppressed and its followers persecuted during the Edo period.<sup>73</sup> Such persecution involved detainment and torture to force apostasy or a renouncement of faith, with those refusing often executed.<sup>74</sup>

Edicts regarding Christianity would first ban the religion and later expel foreign missionaries in a bid to eradicate the religion from Japan, though many still practice in secret, forming secret churches known as *kakure kirishitan*.<sup>75</sup> The fear of the religion was so great that Chinese books imported to Nagasaki were scrutinized for any references to Christianity to preserve the expulsion of Western ideologies.<sup>76</sup> The Shimabara Rebellion, a revolt of Christian peasants in 1637, would irreparably solidify the shogunate's belief that Christianity sought to subvert the strength of the nation.<sup>77</sup> Later treaties would allow Christianity back into Japan, and the Meiji Empire remained sympathetic. While not directly impacting the course of the Meiji restoration, the reintroduction of Christianity demonstrated a willingness to accept certain Western ideals which influenced much of the reforms of the restoration.

### January Proclamation (1868)

The Meiji Restoration officially began on January 3, 1868 when the Imperial palace was seized by coalition forces led by the Satchō alliance, proclaiming the restoration of Imperial rule and stripping the Tokugawa shogunate of its power.<sup>78</sup> Following the takeover, the formal restoration edict of *ōsei fukko* was declared, bringing the new Meiji empire into full effect.<sup>79</sup> Although Yoshinobu stepped back from power in November of 1867, he attempted to retain some semblance of control in the new administration.<sup>80</sup> The *ōsei fukko* edict instead stripped him of his influence, fully abolishing the reign of the Tokugawa family. The restoration order was highly contentious as it directly transferred the highest level of political authority in the country, creating separate factions that supported either Yoshinobu or Emperor Meiji. Despite the upheaval, many demonstrations were loyal to the new government that superseded the old regime.<sup>81</sup> The proclamation would not remain unchallenged, however, and Tokugawa loyalists led by Yoshinobu began coalescing to pose a resistance in what would become the Boshin War.

### Imperial Military Command and Strategy

Following the January Proclamation, the forces of the Meiji Restoration would adopt the moniker of the “Imperial Army” to legitimize their authority in the eyes of the public. Notwithstanding the unity under the restoration order, the command of the military remained decentralized under the control of commanders from certain domains, most notably the Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa domains.<sup>82</sup> The Satsuma and Chōshū forces remained as the head of leadership within the imperial military. Despite the strength of the Satsuma and Chōshū militaries, smaller domains with weaker forces may be particularly vulnerable as decentralized command introduces delays in communications and the deployment of reinforcements. In this command structure, Saigō Takamori of the

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<sup>73</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 76-77.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 92.

<sup>77</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 223-225.

<sup>78</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 290.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Yasuo Masai and Takeshi Toyoda, “The Fall of the Tokugawa,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Japan/The-fall-of-the-Tokugawa>.

<sup>81</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 292.

<sup>82</sup> “Boshin War,” New World Encyclopedia, accessed June 28, 2025, [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Boshin\\_War](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Boshin_War).

Satsuma domain emerged as a field commander of Imperial forces, playing a significant role at the onset of the Boshin War at the Battle of Toba-Fushimi.<sup>83</sup>

The Imperial Military held significant advantages in weaponry and strategy at the start of the war. Early modernization efforts onboarded foreign advisors and imported armaments, making heavy use of newer firearm technologies. In comparison, much of the shogunate military used rather outdated firearms, and even melee weapons in some instances. These new weapons were acquired through Western connections, as many merchants imported weapons into Japan. For example, Thomas Glover, a British merchant, had brought over 500,000 modern rifles into Japan, with 7,300 having been purchased by Chōshū and much of the remainder being purchased by other domains and private buyers.<sup>84</sup> The Imperial Military specifically equipped much of its infantry with Enfield Pattern 1853 muskets as well as Minié rifles, which were ergonomically superior and allowed for a greater volume of fire compared to the array of antiquated matchlocks and limited imports of modern rifles employed by the shogunate army.<sup>85</sup> This trend was mirrored by the heavier armament used in infantry skirmishes, as the Armstrong breech-loading cannon allowed for more rapid firing compared to the muzzle-loading artillery pieces of the shogunate military.

The modernization of the Imperial Army also extended to its strategy, allowing greater flexibility on the battlefield. Taking inspiration from Western infantry tactics, the Imperial Army focused on remaining maneuverable.<sup>86</sup> The use of skirmish lines, coordinated firing, and superior positioning brought success against the more rigid doctrine of the shogunate involving a top-down command structure. Despite past animosity, the Imperial military contacted British military advisors to help develop battlefield strategies.<sup>87</sup> The shogunate instead relied upon French advisors already present in the country who remained to assist the shogunate following the Meiji Restoration.<sup>88</sup>

## Current Situation

### Power of the Cabinet

As the cabinet of the nascent Meiji Restoration, the committee has the capacity to influence or directly affect nearly all aspects of the new government through the passing of edicts and directives. Though unified under the rule of Emperor Meiji, this government is composed of representatives from several domains and thus remains disconnected and feudal.<sup>89</sup> The cabinet must coordinate to address imminent threats, including the reemergence of the Tokugawa faction, the balance between foreign cooperation and preservation of Japanese ideals, as well as economic deterioration that erodes the trust in the capability of the Meiji government. At the same time, societal, political, and economic change must be instated to rapidly modernize Japan and maintain its ability to function on the international stage without losing the support of the people.

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<sup>83</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 149.

<sup>84</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 316.

<sup>85</sup> Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853 - 1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 5, 41.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 95.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> "Tokugawa Political System," Nakasendo Way, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.nakasendoway.com/tokugawa-political-system/>.

## Legitimacy of the Meiji Administration

The Meiji Restoration constructed its initial legitimacy through the involvement of the influential Satsuma domain and the control of the Imperial Palace, thus defining the Meiji Restoration not as a regional effort but a national revolution.<sup>90</sup> The official passing of the ōsei fukko reintroduced imperial rule to the country, positioning the rule of Emperor Meiji as a continuation of the imperial history of Japan.<sup>91</sup> As of the initiation of the crisis, the decisive victory at Toba-Fushimi solidified the perceived legitimacy of the new administration, combined with the retreat of Tokugawa Yoshinobu to Osaka. Nevertheless, the cabinet must continue to enact reforms regarding ineffective domestic policies, restructure itself into an organized and coherent government to adapt to the modernizing political landscape, and establish a national identity for the population to unite under.

## Protection of National Sovereignty

While no military consequences arose following the Perry Expedition, the idea that a small fleet comprising a fraction of a foreign nation's maritime power overpowered Japan alarmed the government and its people. As a result, these concessions to foreign extortion were part of the core justifications for the Meiji Restoration. The inequality of the Kanagawa and Harris treaties were especially inflammatory in the political discourse of the nation. Though cooperation with the United States and interactions with British and French military advisors improve Japan's international relationships, it is unclear whether foreign nations will exploit the instability of the new government to accentuate their presence in the region. Officially, however, the aforementioned western powers and the Netherlands remain neutral amidst the tension of the Boshin War.<sup>92</sup>

Although appearing stronger than the shogunate loyalist militias, the Meiji Empire's military structure remains disjoint and under the command of largely autonomous domains. The lack of a unified command structure to dictate military objectives and strategy leaves Japan vulnerable, especially in coordinating defensive measures. As many of the militias comprising the combined Meiji military were formed to protect their respective domains, the establishment of a national doctrine or strategy, as well as an increase in the number of personnel through recruitment campaigns or conscription, would be highly advisable. At this time, much of Japan's naval defence relies on coastal batteries near important ports including Edo, Nagasaki, and Hakodate.<sup>93</sup> The Imperial Navy owns several steam warships such as the *Kanrin Maru*, while individual domains, such as Satsuma, also have their own modern vessels.<sup>94</sup> However, the current fleet would be unable to stand against an invasion by most foreign naval powers, while the coastal batteries remain limited in both number and firepower.<sup>95</sup> Both ground and maritime forces will require structural reform and a reallocation of resources to develop the strength needed to defend Japan's sovereignty.

## Boshin War

The Tokugawa loyalists attempted to regain power on January 27, 1868, at the battle of Toba-Fushimi.<sup>96</sup> This marked the beginning of the Boshin War and resulted in a Satchō victory. Despite being outnumbered, the Satchō

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<sup>90</sup> Totman, *A History of Japan*, 303.

<sup>91</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 292.

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 46.

<sup>93</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 267.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 296.



forces possessed superior weaponry through connections with traders such as Thomas Glover, affording them the firepower necessary to counteract their numerical disadvantage.<sup>97</sup> The first shots of the war occurred at Toba when a shogunate vanguard approached a Satsuma post at the Koeda Bridge.<sup>98</sup> After attempting to convince the shogunate force to turn away, the Satsuma forces opened fire. Ultimately, they defeated the armed shogunate forces who relied primarily on melee weapons and a limited number of firearms.<sup>99</sup> Fighting continued, spreading to Fushimi the following day. Throughout this, the Satchō-led coalition repelled the shogunate advances throughout the battle. On the 30th, with remnants of his initial fighting force held up in Osaka Castle, Yoshinobu retreated to Edo. The shogunate still retains influence in the central regions of the country and has a significant presence in the north, especially in Hokkaido.<sup>100</sup> The imperial government must leverage its technological superiority and its advanced military doctrine to defeat the shogunate forces while avoiding the aggravation of domains near conflict zones, especially those that currently remain neutral.

## Stagnant Economy

The economy, once stable and productive, has become increasingly inefficient and unable to meet the demands of a rapidly shifting domestic environment. First and foremost is the antiquated feudal economic system built on agricultural output, which formed both the *kokudaka*, an estimation of land value for taxation purposes, as well as the fixed samurai stipends.<sup>101</sup> This system remains inflexible and limits growth and is comparatively outclassed by the industrialized nations that Japan has been interacting with since the mid-19th century. Furthermore, this system has been preventing the government from conducting effective taxation as the economy is increasingly monetized while taxation remains focused on agricultural output. A decentralized feudal economic system incorporates heavy bureaucracy into national economic management, as each semi-autonomous domain operates under its own policies. The opening of Japan to foreign trade has also greatly upset the economy, as the introduction of foreign goods outcompeted many domestic producers out of business, increasing the reliance on imported goods.<sup>102</sup> Foreign trade, introduced through the Perry Expedition and the following treaties, demonstrates the importance of industrialization. If Japan is to remain competitive economically, the cabinet must streamline the messy economic institutions currently in place while redirecting the agricultural model towards an industrial one.

## Social Order

Once a stabilizing force in the turbulent beginnings of the Edo period, the Confucian social order has now become a limiting factor for numerous facets of socioeconomic development. Samurai have been the most impacted, becoming impoverished as their fixed stipends stagnated in the inflating economy.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, samurai shifted towards a bureaucratic role in the peace and centralization of the late Edo period.<sup>104</sup> The peasant class, while valued in the social hierarchy, has become increasingly impoverished in the face of harsher taxation systems. This increased taxation, along with the still insufficient measures to address economic stagnation and the famines of the Edo period, drove many to rebellion—such as during the Ōshio Heihachirō rebellion.<sup>105</sup> Craftsmen

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Conrad Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu (1862-1868)* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1980), 420-426.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Derek van Hise, “The Boshin War: Every Day.” November 16, 2018, educational video, 0:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4800VcGCQpY>.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan*, 2.

<sup>102</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 50-52.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 223-224.

remained relatively stable in urban centers, but it was the merchant class that catapulted to wealth after the introduction of foreign trade.<sup>106</sup> As of the Meiji Restoration, this social order has become archaic and no longer reflective of the economic, social, and political circumstances of wider society. A reform or an abolishment of this structure will be necessary to quell the disaffection of the population, offering the flexibility necessary for the modernization process of the Meiji Restoration.

## Initiating Crisis

As of January 30, 1868, Japan is on the brink of war. The Meiji Restoration, declared just under a month ago in the Imperial Palace of Kyoto, faces attacks from both shogunate loyalist forces as well as the scrutiny of the people.

Despite the declaration of the restoration order, the former shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu has rescinded his recognition in contradiction to his relinquishing of power in late 1867.<sup>107</sup> He continues to command a sizable military, though with outdated weaponry and inferior tactics, while threatening the head of the Meiji administration in Kyoto. The first shots of the conflict were fired at the Battle of Toba-Fushimi 3 days ago. As Tokugawa forces attempted to advance on Kyoto, a Satsuma outpost near Toba stopped them and subsequent Imperial advances have driven them back. For this battle, although victory seems assured, Yoshinobu's retreat and his unknown whereabouts leave loose ends as he remains in the north surrounded by loyalist forces.

Fortunately, military conflict is currently limited to the domestic dispute unfolding as foreign powers remain neutral. France too, as one of the closer allies of the former shogunate and an avenue for the loyalists to obtain munitions and training, also remains neutral.<sup>108</sup> However, foreign delegations remain within Japan's borders and watch closely. The Meiji government, having promised to uphold prior foreign agreements, must continue to honour these terms and avoid presenting vulnerabilities that other countries may seek to exploit.

The domestic situation presents its own set of challenges, especially as the fragility of the economy shatters faith in its ability to continue to function. Taxation systems are inconsistent across the domains, insufficient revenue is generated for the central government, and inflationary concerns grow as imports flood the country. Furthermore, the social order grows obsolete as samurai become impoverished while merchants accumulate wealth, thus transitioning power down the social hierarchy. The peasant class also struggles in the face of increasing taxation and natural disasters that disrupt agriculture. Overall, the decentralized economic structure has left the economy in a lethargic state and centralization through reform may be necessary to restructure and industrialize the economy to match its peers.

It is now up to this cabinet to ensure the Meiji Restoration's survival and refine its operation to create a future where Japan persists as a sovereign nation with the power to stand up to any of the threats it may encounter.

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<sup>106</sup> Charles D. Sheldon, "Merchants and Society in Tokugawa Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 1983): 477–88, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00007587>, 479–481.

<sup>107</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 283.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

### Emperor Meiji

Emperor Meiji, born Mutsuhito in 1852, ascended to the throne at the age of 15 in 1867 following the death of Emperor Kōmei. While initially in a ceremonial role, the restoration of imperial rule has propelled him into an extremely prominent role as the symbolic head of state of the new empire. The emperor's current role primarily concerns legislation as he is mainly responsible for issuing decrees and edicts, but he will seek to take a more active role in the government as the Meiji Restoration continues.<sup>109</sup> Regardless, Emperor Meiji remains one of the most important figures for foreign relations and the legitimizing of governmental policy and military action. Emperor Meiji will be in favour of taking inspiration from Western nations to fortify Japan's own strength by industrializing the economy, abolishing the feudal class system in favour of equality across society, and adopting Western military structures, weaponry, and doctrines.<sup>110</sup> Emperor Meiji is the face of the new Imperial Rule and must demonstrate the government's strength without alienating the population or provoking foreign nations.

### Saigō Takamori

Takamori is one of the more influential leaders of the imperial faction, having been instrumental to the victory at Toba-Fushimi.<sup>111</sup> Due to the disorganized structure of this cabinet, Takamori takes on several important roles. Apart from being a member of this council, he also leads the Satsuma portion of the Imperial Army and will facilitate communications between the cabinet and the Satsuma domain. Takamori has been one of the most important individuals in the establishment of the Meiji Restoration and thus remains fiercely loyal to Emperor Meiji. His loyalty, however, does not extend to blind obedience of all elements of the new empire; he remains committed to upholding the value of the samurai class and traditional values and abhors the abolishment of the social order, a point which may cause friction with the more radical reformers of the committee.<sup>112</sup>

### Kido Takayoshi

Takayoshi is one of the most prominent figures who facilitated the Meiji Restoration as a representative from the Chōshū Domain and a significant reformer in the new Meiji government. He maintains good relations with the Satsuma domain, being one of the leaders to negotiate the Satchō Alliance.<sup>113</sup> Takayoshi prioritizes modernization of the political system, drawing inspiration from Western administrations. Important practices from such a system include a national constitution, merit-based appointments that include representatives from the public, and the dismantling of the feudal system in favour of a prefectural system.<sup>114</sup> He also plays an important role in public relations as one of the forefronts of the Meiji Restoration and will remain committed to reformist ideals.

### Ōkubo Toshimichi

Ōkubo Toshimichi is one of the architects of the coup d'état that occurred during the January Proclamation and was established as a central figure in the new government. As a samurai of the Satsuma domain, he has long been

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<sup>109</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> James Stanlaw, "Mutsuhito," EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/mutsuhito>.

<sup>111</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 149-152.

<sup>112</sup> William M. Zanella, "Saigō Takamori," EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/saigo-takamori>.

<sup>113</sup> Ravina, *Saigo Takamori*, 127-128.

<sup>114</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 358-360.

opposed to the rule of the shogunate. He maintains a strategic and gradual strategy for reform, seeking to avoid inflaming the public during the restructuring of the nation.<sup>115</sup> Toshimichi is a proponent of the consolidation of power for the government, and aims to dismantle the feudal system as well as negotiate a voluntary handover of territory from the daimyo to imperial rule.<sup>116</sup> He is also partial to taking inspiration from Western nations, particularly economic reforms that facilitate industrialization.<sup>117</sup> His centralization of power, however, may lead to conflict with the public as well as more constitutionalist members of the committee.

### **Iwakura Tomomi**

While not a military strategist, Tomomi remains close to Emperor Meiji as his chamberlain and has slowly risen to greater power in the imperial court.<sup>118</sup> Tomomi is a persistent supporter of the Emperor's role in governance, having been influential in the Emperor's refusal to ratify treaties that allowed the United States greater influence in Japan.<sup>119</sup> Apart from his strong support of imperial rule, Tomomi takes a cautious stance regarding reforms. While he supports the transformation of the nation, Tomomi adopts a more rational stance, hoping to instate reform gradually and avoid social unrest from the population. He is likely to oppose any military actions beyond the response to the ongoing Boshin War for fears that more conflict may destabilize the regime.<sup>120</sup>

### **Itō Hirobumi**

Hirobumi is a young but promising member of the Chōshū domain who has had significant exposure to Western nations and ideals and is closely involved in the incorporation of Western ideals into modernization efforts and administrative planning.<sup>121</sup> Having studied in England prior to the Meiji Restoration, he is heavily in favour of reform and his stance on foreign ideals is much less hostile than many others of the committee. Hirobumi hopes to incorporate such ideals through changes such as constitutional rights and the abolishment of the class system.<sup>122</sup> He will also be heavily involved in foreign affairs and is likely to attempt to participate in or organize his own expeditions to contact Western officials.

### **Yamagata Aritomo**

Aritomo is a Chōshū commander who plays an important role in the Boshin war as an officer, and while not yet a central figure to the government, represents the military's interests. His structuring of his forces follows a centralized command structure inspired by the Prussian military, and he aims to secure more allocation of government resources towards the military through measures such as conscription.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, his modernization of the military inherently unseats the samurai class from their role as important military figures.

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<sup>115</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 352-353.

<sup>116</sup> "OKUBO Toshimichi," Portraits of Modern Japanese Historical Figures, 2004, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/32/>.

<sup>117</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Ōkubo Toshimichi," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Okubo-Toshimichi>.

<sup>118</sup> "Profile of Iwakura Tomomi, A Leading Figure in the Meiji Restoration," The Former Retreat of Tomomi Iwakura, accessed June 28, 2025, <https://iwakura-tomomi.jp/en/iwakura-tomomi/>.

<sup>119</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Iwakura Tomomi," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Iwakura-Tomomi>.

<sup>120</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 351-353.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Jonathan L. Thorndike, "Itō Hirobumi," EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/ito-hirobumi>.

<sup>123</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 66.

## Sanjō Sanetomi

Sanetomi was one of the more radical proponents of the restoration, having acted as the messenger of the previous Emperor Kōmei, and now adopts the position of the Minister of the Right.<sup>124</sup> This position is primarily symbolic as a relic of the deteriorating imperial court, but Sanetomi himself maintains influence through his connection to the Emperor prior to his appointment.<sup>125</sup> He is a strong supporter of the sonnō jōi movement but is otherwise a cautious reformist who supports the use of imperial powers to maintain order and introduction of western values.<sup>126</sup>

## Ōmura Masujirō

Masujirō is another representative of the military as the Vice-Minister of Military Affairs.<sup>127</sup> Prior to the Meiji Restoration, he had played an important role as a strategist for the Chōshū domain during the Chōshū expeditions.<sup>128</sup> As the Vice-Minister for Military Affairs, he is credited for the founding of the modern Japanese Army by taking strong inspiration from the French military structure to shape the Imperial Japanese Army.<sup>129</sup> Masujirō supports centralization and merit-based appointments, especially for the military, and seeks to incorporate nationwide conscription while reducing the role of the samurai in military command.<sup>130</sup>

## Ōkuma Shigenobu

Shigenobu hails from the Hizen domain, a westernized and reformist domain. He serves as an advisor on economic matters and was an early supporter of centralization and modernization.<sup>131</sup> Many of his views supported the incorporation of Western-style modernization, and he will be important in communications with Britain and the United States, having learned English.<sup>132</sup> Altogether, he remains aligned with the reformers.

## Shibusawa Eiichi

Eiichi has been one of the most important figures in the economic development of Japan, reaching a position of prominence from a peasant family.<sup>133</sup> While he was part of the Tokugawa government, he studied in Europe for a brief period. He later resigned from the Tokugawa administration after its collapse and was invited into the new Meiji government.<sup>134</sup> In the government, he serves as a strong proponent of the introduction of capitalism to Japan while maintaining ethics built on Confucian values.

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<sup>124</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 346.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> “SANJO Sanetomi,” Portraits of Modern Japanese Historical Figures, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/97/>.

<sup>127</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 363.

<sup>128</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Ōmura Masujirō,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Omura-Masujiro>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 81, 363.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Ōkuma Shigenobu,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Okuma-Shigenobu>.

<sup>133</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Shishaku Shibusawa Eiichi,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shishaku-Shibusawa-Eiichi>.

<sup>134</sup> “Brief Biography of Shibusawa Eiichi,” Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.shibusawa.or.jp/english/eiichi/biography.html>.

## **Tanaka Fujimaro**

Fujimaro is a rising figure within the Meiji Government who focuses primarily on the legal and educational systems. He opposes a rapid political upheaval but is still in favour of reform implemented gradually.<sup>135</sup> Fujimaro supports a centralized government, especially one with compulsory elementary education. As a moderate reformer, he is one of the more progressive thinkers regarding the structure of society, arguing that widespread education would enable Japan to match the power of Western nations.

## **Fukuoka Takachika**

Takachika is a high-ranking samurai from the Tosa domain, currently serving as a political advisor and negotiator. He was involved in drafting the ōsei fukko and advocated for a centralization of government power and the abolition of the feudal system.<sup>136</sup> Takachika also supports the abolition of the social structure, which extends to his belief in meritocracy for government positions. Additionally, Takachika has concerns about the government's public image, and seeks to create a national constitution to preserve a more modern societal structure.<sup>137</sup>

## **Itagaki Taisuke**

Taisuke is a strong reformer, as a leading political figure in the Tosa domain. He particularly opposes the established social order, supporting instead a system of meritocracy and flexibility.<sup>138</sup> Matching this philosophy, Taisuke also favours a constitutional system with representative assemblies.<sup>139</sup> Taisuke is unique for his propensity for democratic values and is an especially strong reformer regarding political and societal structures.

## **Prince Arisugawa Taruhito**

Prince Taruhito was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Army at the beginning of the Boshin War. While mostly symbolic, with much of the strategy executed by domain generals, his imperial lineage provided legitimacy to the Meiji forces during the onset of the war, and will continue to do so as the war unfolds.<sup>140</sup> As part of the Imperial Family of Japan, he will remain staunchly loyal to the Emperor and may act as a figurehead during the centralization of the military.

## **Etō Shinpei**

Shinpei is a samurai of the Hizen domain who serves as a general in the Boshin War who exerted significant influence to secure the support of imperial rule from Hizen. His origins keep him close to those in the samurai

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<sup>135</sup> "C. Tanaka Fujimaro and David Murray," Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology Japan, accessed June 29, 2025, [https://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317258.htm](https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317258.htm).

<sup>136</sup> Jonathon L. Thorndike, "Promulgation of Japan's Charter Oath," EBSCO, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/promulgation-japans-charter-oath>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 338.

<sup>139</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Hakushaku Itagaki Taisuke," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hakushaku-Itagaki-Taisuke>.

<sup>140</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 337.

class, and he opposes an abolishment of the class system and seeks to preserve the privilege of the samurai.<sup>141</sup> Regarding most other matters, he is a moderate reformist.

### **Matsukata Masayoshi**

Masayoshi is an emerging figure in the government who has acted as an economic advisor for the Satsuma domain. Before the overthrow of the shogunate, he studied Western science and mathematics. Also having foreseen the conflict between Satsuma and the Tokugawa regime, he purchased a ship in Nagasaki named Kasuga.<sup>142</sup> He advocates for a conservative fiscal plan that balances the national budget and limits inflation while promoting a centralized economy and industrialization, all to transition away from the agricultural economy of the Edo period. Masayoshi is in favour of economic reform, but less so of reforming Japan's political structure.

### **Tani Tateki**

Tateki is an outspoken member of the Meiji restoration, having joined the sonnō jōi movement before the overthrow of the shogunate. He currently serves as an officer in the Boshin War and was present at the opening Battle of Toba-Fushimi. Tateki holds the samurai in high regard, especially concerning military matters, and encourages mandating military training for all sons of samurai to form a specialized unit.<sup>143</sup> He adopts a more traditional perspective on military command, one that still maintains the samurai as an important part of the structure.<sup>144</sup> As a result of his allegiance to the sonnō jōi, he fiercely opposes Western influence, seeing it as a violation of Japan's sovereignty. He does, however, carry moderately reformist ideals regarding societal structure and supports civil liberties and a national constitution under imperial rule.

### **Gotō Shōjirō**

A high-ranking member of the Tosa domain, Shōjirō holds a senior position in the new Meiji government.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, during the transitional period, Shōjirō was one of the advisors to persuade the daimyo of the Tosa domain to pressure Tokugawa Yoshinobu to peacefully surrender his position.<sup>146</sup> His reluctance to involve the military suggests his moderate approach to government, although he is still in favour of reform. Shōjirō is particularly committed to maintaining representation from the wider public within the government, especially for those from his domain of Tosa.<sup>147</sup>

### **Kuroda Kiyotaka**

Kiyotaka is a samurai from Satsuma, playing an important part in the reestablishment of imperial rule and taking a military leadership role in the Boshin War.<sup>148</sup> He is strongly loyal to the goals of the restoration as well as the

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<sup>141</sup> "ETO Shinpei," Portraits of Modern Japanese Historical Figures, accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/242/>.

<sup>142</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 371-373.

<sup>143</sup> Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, 363.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 310-311.

<sup>147</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Gotō Shōjirō," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Goto-Shojiro>.

<sup>148</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Count Kuroda Kiyotaka," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Count-Kuroda-Kiyotaka>.

authority of the government, and willing to use force to assert such authority. This propensity for violence was demonstrated in his involvement with the Namamugi Incident, where a British national was killed for refusing to adhere to Japanese customs despite legal exemptions for foreigners outlined in prior treaties.<sup>149</sup> Kiyotaka's harsh approach to maintaining order may provoke strong responses from pacifists within the committee as well as the public.

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<sup>149</sup> "Kuroda Kiyotaka," Japan Box, accessed August 1, 2025, <https://thejapanbox.com/blogs/japanese-samurai/kuroda-kiyotaka>.



## Discussion Questions

1. How can the Meiji government assert its legitimacy in regions controlled by the shogunate? Is abolishing feudalism necessary to do so?
2. How should this new government be structured? Should the administration adopt a constitution and Western political model such as a parliamentary system, or should they develop their own centralized framework?
3. What should the role of the emperor be in the new empire?
4. How should the traditional social structure, specifically the role of the samurai, be altered to help reflect the new goals of the Meiji Restoration?
5. How could a national identity be established to gain the favour of the population?
6. What will be the new attitude toward Christianity and other foreign religions in the Meiji Restoration?
7. Should a resolution of the war seek peaceful surrender with Yoshinobu and loyalist forces, or is victory important to discourage future uprisings?
8. How must the imperial military operate to avoid antagonizing local populations, especially those closer to the former shogunate?
9. To what extent should Western military advisors be allowed to influence the decisions of the central command?
10. How should the Meiji government balance industrialization with the agricultural sector? Is there a specific economic system that may support their goals the best (ie. command vs. market economy)?
11. Should samurai continue receiving stipends, or should their income be revised?
12. Are foreign investments and developments necessary to the Meiji government's economy? To what extent should they be allowed?

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